



**Cancer
Council**
WA

60
YEARS

Select Committee – Personal Choice and Community Safety

Opening Statement –

This year Cancer Council WA celebrates 60 years of service to the WA community.

Our purpose is to reduce the incidence and impact of cancer.

Great gains have been made in this time. When we were founded the overall five year cancer survival rates were 30-40%. They are now nearly 70% and for some of the more common cancers, if found early, over 90%.

These gains have come through huge investment in research to improve prevention programs, screening, diagnosis and treatment.

Cancer Council WA is predominantly donor funded and we focus on education, prevention, support services and research.

We have invested \$47m into local, world class research in this time.

We pride ourselves on being an evidence-based organisation and throughout our history we have maintained this integrity.

With tobacco being the leading cause of cancer death in this country, and being responsible for the greatest disease burden - CCWA strongly believes that any politician or political party that accepts money from the tobacco industry has a significant conflict of interest in regards to public health.

Smoking causes 16 types of cancer and in WA 1500 people die from smoking related causes each year.

We understand it takes time to build the evidence through research and that changing behaviours at a population level takes time.

Our education campaigns have been long term and highly successful.

From Sunsmart, and the internationally recognised Slip Slop Slap campaigns, and now in its 20th year of Sunsmart Schools – we have seen melanoma rates for 18-39 year olds halve.

Our Make Smoking History campaign has contributed to huge falls in the rates of tobacco smoking. As recently as the year 2000 over 22% of West Australians smoked. By 2017 this had fallen to 11.6% mainly via education and government policy and legislation (including excise, advertising restrictions, restrictions on where people can smoke, plain packaging amongst others).

WA is world leading in its low rates of tobacco use.

A succession of governments should be commended for their stance on tobacco given the burden it places on the community.

More recently, our Live Lighter campaign focusses on the growing problem of obesity, via education on nutrition and physical activity.

Why is prevention Important?

The trajectory of health expenditure in WA over the previous decade is unsustainable. The health budget effectively doubled in ten years. If we want a healthy, happy and productive community then we must focus on prevention and population health.

We all pay for an unhealthy population and the bill will only get bigger.

Government absolutely has a role to play in improving the health of its citizens and there are countless successful examples such as tobacco control and the banning of asbestos products, where the benefits of these measures far outweigh the minor impingement on personal freedoms.

In regards to e-cigarettes, I refer to CCWA's submission and the provided *Statement on e-cigarettes in Australia*.

In simple terms there is growing evidence of;

e-cigarettes as a precursor to tobacco use in young people

direct health harms

e-cigarette use in non-smokers associated with future uptake of tobacco use

There is an absence of evidence that;

e-cigarettes are an effective quitting aid

and the extent to which e-cigarettes may reduce harm over conventional tobacco cigarettes **has not been determined**

Just last night the Federal Drug Administration (FDA) in the US released a report highlighting major concerns with the massive rise in teen vaping rates in the US and is calling for restrictions and bans on flavours and menthol.

The increase in numbers is being described as an epidemic - more than 3.6 million middle and high school students were current (past 30 day) e-cigarette users in 2018, a dramatic increase of more than 1.5 million students since last year. They note;

- **78% increase in use by high school students.**
- **significant increase in frequent use among high school e-cigarette users**
- **The increase in e-cigarette use has driven a 38 percent increase in use of any tobacco product among high school students (from 19.6 percent in 2017 to 27.1 percent in 2018). This reverses a decline in recent years.**

Most importantly the FDA is very clear that youth e-cigarette use leads to smoking – “The data show that kids using e-cigarettes are going to be more likely to try combustible cigarettes later. This is a large pool of future risk..... The data make unmistakably clear that, if we’re to break the cycle of addiction to nicotine, preventing youth initiation on nicotine is a paramount imperative.”

In the Australian context these figures are hugely worrying and argue strongly against any relaxing of current laws.

There should be a conclusion very loud and clear that Australia has done well in taking a precautionary approach - this should absolutely continue so we don't introduce the same crisis.

CLOSING STATEMENT

Put even more simply - the evidence for harm is increasing and the evidence for benefit is decreasing.

CCWA trusts the regulatory processes in this country. Those such as the Therapeutic Goods Administration. The onus is on industry to prove safety and benefit and they have failed to do so.

It took many years for the evidence on the harms of tobacco to reach a point where it was inarguable.

On this basis we support the precautionary approach and strongly support the position taken by the Federal and all state governments and that the current laws should not be weakened.

Ashley Reid

CEO

Cancer Council WA

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